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THE VENANGO TRAIL



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THE VENANGO TRAIL

Northwestern Pennsylvania Historical Series

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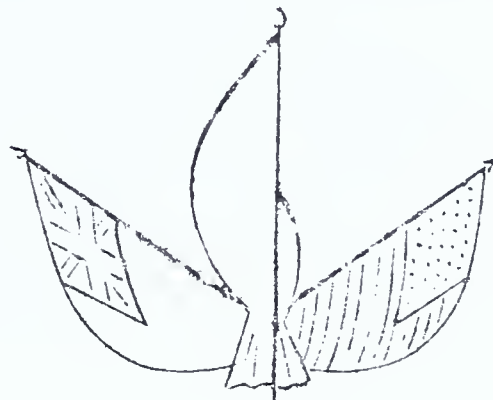
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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

HARRISBURG, 1940



I N T R O D U C T I O N

The Venango Trail was the first important thoroughfare of northwestern Pennsylvania, and as such was a factor of primary importance in the early history of the region.

The means of communication are important in the history of any region; the early beginnings of these routes establish the general lines of travel for all time. A road map of Roman Britain is strikingly similar to one of the present day, though fifteen centuries lie between them. That one generation builds upon what previous generations have done is nowhere shown more clearly than in the story of highways.

Two hundred years ago the Venango Trail was a forest path, unknown and unused save by animals and Indians. From the southern shores of Lake Erie to the forks of the Ohio, the ribbon-like course of the trail climbed ridges, fled down valley plains, crossed noisy creeks and quiet rivers, to enter, at last, the Ohio Country.

From season to season, the migration of buffalo and deer widened and hardened many trail beds. The animal paths, along which could be found many springs from which the thirsty four-footed traveler sought refreshment, led to feeding grounds and to "salt licks." These forest passageways very often wound over high ground, avoiding the swampy terrain where travel was more difficult.

The Indian observed and made use of the natural advantages of the animal paths. But guiding his selection of trails was the location of his enemies. A trail that offered security was a good trail. His hunting grounds were another factor in his trail selection, and the Venango route, from the forks of the Ohio to Lake Erie, offered a wide variety of fish and game to the Indian hunter. Thus both security and provisions were available to the Indian through his knowledge of the Venango Trail.

The primary physical development of the trail began in 1753 when the French built the original portage road from Fort Presque Isle to Fort Le Boeuf. From that year until 1764, the trail course was known and used by the French, the English, and by the savage tribes who used it as a war path under the leadership of the crafty Kiasutha. Yet in 1782 the trail was almost forgotten; Irvine and Ellicott and others who aided in the settlement of northwestern Pennsylvania found the trail almost impassable, almost reclaimed by the forest.

But the American pioneer, who built his road over many miles of the old trail, was building with a resolute purpose that broke the lingering grasp of forest and swamp. The wilderness gave way before the determination of these stalwarts, who in the years from 1796 to 1832 built almost three thousand miles of roads in Pennsylvania, among which was the Erie-Pittsburgh route, still following the general course of the old trail.

Today, at many points along the highway between Erie and Pittsburgh, our concrete highway merges with the Venango Trail. Between Erie and Waterford, the Perry Highway twice crosses and is never more than a mile or two from the course of the trail that has served not only in the development of northwestern Pennsylvania, but also in the cause of man against the wilderness.

The historical associations, origins, development, and course of this important route are presented in this Story of the Venango Trail. This is not intended to be an exhaustive study but to give a general account of the main features of its history. The pamphlet was prepared by workers of the Frontier Forts and Trails Survey, a historical research project of the Work Projects Administration, under the sponsorship of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission.

1. Origins of the Trail

The Venango Trail may be said to have had three main segments:

1. The Presque Isle portage connected Lake Erie with the headwaters of French Creek, joining two waterways;
2. The trail between Lake Le Boeuf and the junction of French Creek and the Allegheny River;
3. The trail between the Allegheny-French Creek junction and the forks of the Ohio were land parallels for the natural waterways. In this respect, the Venango Trail was laid out by the natural features of the country.

Overland travel from Erie to a point below Lake Le Boeuf at Waterford, reaches a stream of moderate size, known as French Creek (named so by Washington in an early report). It is fed by small tributaries from its source waters in New York State and in northwestern Pennsylvania.

French Creek, flowing southward, skirts the site of the former Indian village of Cussewago, now the town of Meadville. Farther on, the historic stream passes Custaloga's Town. At Fort Venango (Franklin), French Creek joins the Allegheny river which sweeps to the southeast, then to the southwest in a wide arc through the counties of Venango, Clarion, Armstrong and Allegheny to reach Fort Duquesne, today's city of Pittsburgh.

Animal Paths.

A complex network of animal paths threaded forests and plains. Just how closely the Indian followed these paths is largely a matter of conjecture.

However, linking together watering places and salt licks, the trails of elk, deer and buffalo invariably followed the shortest possible routes. The location of fording places along these routes were first determined by animals, and were usually to be found at the confluence of streams.

Accordingly, a knowledge of these important factors was gained by Indian use of animal paths and to this extent the Indian in turn contributed his quota toward the solution of first wilderness travel problems.

The Indian Trail.

The Venango Trail was known to the Indians of the Six Nations. It was used by the Eries, Senecas, Delawares, Minnogois, Shawnees and Tuscaroras.

The trail fulfilled in more than one respect the qualifications demanded of it by the Indian. Where a water route afforded a simpler passage, a water route was used; where it was necessary to portage, the portage was always the shortest possible; where the trail ascended a hill, it followed the ascent for two purposes: a vantage point from which to view the approach of danger, and dry ground over which swift travel was possible.

From the trail the Indian also sought what can be termed manifold security: safety in travel; ease of progress on the journey; food when it was required. All of these were given him by the Venango Trail, and yet with characteristic Indian indolence, he built no bridges, erected no inns, posted no signs. If he held the thought that he was taking their road-

ways from the animals, he must, too, have thought to leave those pathways much as he had found them.

The Venango Trail region from Lake Erie to Pittsburgh abounded with a variety of game. And from the trail, not more than a day's journey to right or left, were to be found other hunting grounds. This region supplied elk, deer, buffalo, bear, wild turkey, grouse and passenger pigeon. From French Creek and its connecting waters could be taken sturgeon, muskallunge, bass and other fish with food value.

"The hunting trails" Hulbert tells us, "led from an Indian nation's villages to its hunting-grounds and through them. . . . Frequently, when the hunting-grounds were at a distance from the home land, the hunters went to them, if possible, on water ways as in the case of the Iroquois, who held for a period, the territory between the Blue Ridge and Great Lakes as their hunting-ground to which they came in great fleets upon the "Cho' [the Ohio River] and its northern tributaries, or the Ottawas, who, while they lived near Detroit, came to the hunting-grounds on the Wabash and Miami to the south, which they claimed. . . . in such a manner. . . . many of the Indian thoroughfares which afterward were put to so many uses, were originally made. There is little doubt, however, that the routes broken long before by buffalo and pre-Columbian Indians were found and followed and served as main thoroughfares. With hunting-lodges built at convenient points on these thoroughfares, the minor cross trails were broken to and fro along the watersheds and from the rivers upward and inland. . . ."¹

The Venango Trail, for the Indian, became actually a combination of trails. From Fort Presque Isle to Fort Le Boeuf (Waterford) it was a portage trail, connecting Lake Erie with French Creek. From this point he could travel by water to what is now Meadville, and from there to Franklin. Continuing on down the Allegheny, his water route would bring him to Pittsburgh. If he traveled overland from Le Boeuf, his course would closely follow that of the water route, and he would then be making use of what he called a River Trail.

Used by Traders.

Among the early traders who used the Venango Trail were George Croghan, later famous for frontier activity, and John

1 Archer Butler Hulbert, Historic Highways of America, Vol. II, pp. 45-46.

Fraser, a trader at what is now the location of Franklin.

In 1747, a letter from George Croghan to the Provincial Secretary of Pennsylvania indicated the trade between the English and the Six Nation Indians:

. . . I am just returned from the Woods and has brought a letter, a French scalp, and some wampum, for ye Governor, from a part of ye Six Nation Ingans that has their dwelling on ye borders of Lake Arey [Erie?]. Those Ingans were always in the French interest till now, but this spring almost all the Ingans in the Woods have declared against ye French; and I think this will be a fair opportunity, if persued by some small presents, to have all ye French cut off in them parts; for the Ingans will think a great dail of a little powder and lead att this time; besides it will be a mains of drawing them that has nott yett joyned.²

Fraser was located at the junction of the Allegheny and French Creek. His post was known as Venango, but is not to be confused with the present-day town of Venango, between Meadville and Cambridge Springs. This location was a vantage point in the promotion of his trade activities.

Straight west of the post, in what is now Ohio, the Muskingum trail reached the Cuyahoges, Delawares, Mingoes and Ottawas; to the north were Custaloga's Town and Cussewago; southward, at the forks of the Ohio and Allegheny, Fort Duquesne yet remained to be built, but a Mingo Indian village was located at the junction of the Beaver and Ohio rivers.

From this post at Venango, Fraser likewise could contact the Indians along the upper Allegheny, in and around the Broken Straw region, that is now known as Warren County.

At the same time, the cross-country trail, that ran from Franklin southeast across the Allegheny Mountains to Bald Eagle, was important to Fraser in contacting central Pennsylvania.

2 Hanna, Wilderness Trail, Vol. I, p. 323.

2. Auxiliary Routes

A highway is important primarily because of other routes it joins, and the Venango Trail linked many of the early trails along the frontier. In the network of animal and Indian trails, certain trails were of primary importance to existence on the frontier. Thus we find the Venango Trail a major consideration in the plan of wilderness travel.

A route via the waters of Lake Erie extended from Fort Niagara at Buffalo to Fort Detroit. Generally, the course was charted along the shores of Lake Erie and seldom did the early navigators, with their frail craft - canoes and bateaux - challenge the rough waters of the lake very far from the protective shore line.

Along the southern and western shores of Lake Erie was a route known as the Lake Shore or Lake Trail. From Sandusky, east and west, this Lake Shore trail served the fur trade, and was no less important than the famed Cuyahoga-Sandusky Trade Trail, which served south-central and eastern Ohio.

At Sandusky Bay the Scioto Trail through Ohio met the Lake Trail. The Scioto was the main route of the Shawnee from the hunting grounds of Kentucky to the fishing grounds of Lake Erie.

Another great trail of Ohio, which connected with the routes to Lake Erie and the north was the Walhounding Trail. By means of this route, the Indians of the Scioto and Muskingum regions reached the lake shore area.

All of these trails interlocked with the Lake Trail. In Pennsylvania, the Venango Trail led from the Lake Trail at Erie southward to the site of Fort Pitt, and for many years was the only direct route of communication between those points.

Linking the Cumberland Valley region with Lake Erie, a cross-country trail ran from Fort Bedford, northeast of Pittsburgh, to Frankstown. From thence, crossing the Alleghenies and the lower branches of the Susquehanna, this trail bore north-westward, skirted the eastern edge of "Buffaloe Swamp" and joined the Venango Trail at Franklin, over which it gained access to the lake shore. Later, the Susquehanna-Waterford Turnpike route followed many miles of this same cross-country trail course.

In all probability a trail connected Le Boeuf and the Indian village known as Buckaloons on Brokenstraw Creek near what is now Warren, Pennsylvania. John Hocktattler, captured by the French in 1755, speaks of being taken up French Creek to Le Boeuf,

and from there:

. . . After 3 days travel Est south Est, I was brought to Buxotons [Buckaloons] Cr[ee]k where it empties into the Ohio[.] whe [we] came to Indian Castle which lys upon the corner of it, there I was kept Prisoner all that time. . . .

It is probable that the route over which Hocktattler was taken to Warren is the same one which the Ellicotts, William and Andrew, followed in 1795 when they cut a bridle path from Le Boeuf (Waterford) to Hickorytown, while engaged in initial survey work for the state.

3. The French Trail.

Causes of French Occupation.

The infiltration of English traders into the Onio valley threatened French domination in the fur trade. To command the valley would lessen this danger to French activity along the western frontier. As early as 1674 the French had entertained the thought of utilizing Lake Erie and the Niagara Portage as a route to the Gulf of Mexico and Louisiana.

In 1732 Daniel de Joncaire was reported as contacting the Senecas of the Lake Erie region, and the friendly relations thus begun made possible the establishment of a French line of defense along the Venango Trail. In 1739, de Longueuil's expedition to Louisiana made use of the Chautauqua portage route, down the Conewango and Allegheny rivers to the Ohio.

The Chautauqua route was used again in 1749 by Celoron, who buried a lead plate at Indian God Rock some distance below Franklin. The plate bore an inscription claiming the Ohio valley in the name of the King of France. During this period the French began to realize the importance of the trail, as it made possible more rapid communication between Canada and Louisiana.

To protect their westward trails, the French planned a chain of forts, to extend from Lake Erie to the forks of the Ohio. Fort Niagara, at the mouth of the Niagara River, erected long before, served as a starting point for this chain. In 1752, a small fort was built by Joncaire de Chabert, a short distance above the falls, preparing the way for more extensive operations on Lake Erie and in the Ohio country.

Marin - Boishebert - Le Mercier.

In April of 1753, Commander Marin and the engineer, Le Mercier, set out from Niagara to establish the second fort. At Barcelona, or the mouth of Chautauqua Creek on Lake Erie, Marin found an advance French party of five hundred men, under the command of Boishebert, already laying out a fort site. An argument over establishing a fort at this place caused Le Mercier to explore farther down the shore of Lake Erie, where he "discovered" the harbor of Presque Isle.

Le Mercier evidently knew of French Creek, and that it could be reached by portage from Presque Isle. His source of information may have been the de Longueuil expedition of 1739, of which he had been a member. The de Lery map of the expedition shows the "river au Boeuf" plainly marked; Le Mercier may thus have reached the opinion that the Presque Isle portage would prove a better route than that of the Chautauqus. Again, information may have come from the Indians.

Although the Presque Isle-Le Boeuf portage was used constantly by the French in 1753-54, the Chautauqua Portage trail was kept as a subsidiary route via the Allegheny to Franklin.

While Fort Presque Isle was still under construction, Le Mercier prospected for a route over which portage could be made to French Creek. His reconnoitering took him across Mill Creek and Walnut Creek to the little lake known even today as Le Boeuf. On the northern bank of the principal stream which feeds the mile-wide lake, the second fort of the Venango Trail was erected, in a naturally protected situation on a little islet formed by streams and marshes. A fifteen-mile segment of the Venango Trail was thus secured to the French.

Today, the fifteen mile trip from Erie to Waterford offers no difficulty, but in 1753 the efforts to move equipment and men were heartbreaking. Almost impassable swamp ground, densely wooded hills, and the illness of the soldiers made still more difficult a task that was all too severe for even these builders of empire.

De Lery's remark, that the portage should be bridged almost all the way, indicates the nature of one great difficulty in the transportation of supplies. Plodding knee deep through the swamps, constantly exposed to the elements, the men were worn out by the exacting physical efforts of transport work.

A letter written by Duquesne, August 30, 1753, foreshadowed later developments. An excerpt from the letter reads:

" . . . The only anxiety I feel is, that the River au Boeuf Portage will delay the entrance

of our troops into the Beautiful river
[the Ohio], as it is long, and there is
considerable to carry, and the horses I
have sent thither have arrived there
exhausted by fatigue. . . .

Vaudreuil wrote to the Minister of France in July of 1755
concerning the movement of supplies over the trail route:

VAUDREUIL TO THE MINISTER

Montreal, July 24, 1755

Monseigneur,

* * * * *

Fort Duquesne is actually menaced. On
the 7th of this month, the English were within
6 or 8 leagues of this fort. I am informed
that they number 3,000, with some artillery
and other equipment for making a siege.

I should not be worried about this fort
if the officer commanding there had all his
forces. They consist of about 1600 men, half
militia troops and half savages.

With these forces this commander should
have been prepared to make up parties con-
siderable enough to trouble the march of the
English, as soon as he learned of it. These
parties would have harried them, and would
have certainly repulsed them. Under the
circumstances, everything favors us, and gives
us a very great advantage.

But unfortunately in the autumn there
was not enough foresight to supply this fort
with provisions and munitions of war, with
the result that the commander, needing one
thing or another, is obliged to use the great-
er part of his men in going and coming for the
transport of these provisions and munitions.
They could not even reach him in abundance be-
cause of the slowness of the Presque Isle Port-
age, and the shallowness of the Rivière au Boeuf.

* * * * *

The loss of men caused by the hardships of supply movements is indicated in another letter from Vaudreuil to the Minister, dated October 30, 1755:

VAUDREUIL TO THE MINISTER

Montreal, October 30, 1755

Monseigneur,

* * * * *

. . . The Belle Rivière establishment is the direct cause of ruin for the inhabitants. More of them are dead than we could have lost during several years of war, and this is for a reason that I cannot hide from you, namely--that they have been driven without the slightest humane consideration, to carry bales and other goods on the portage, which is an idea very much opposed to the good of the service.

You see, Monseigneur, in what a condition I am finding the colonists and their lands. With my zeal for the King's service and my attachment for my country, I cannot refuse to have the honor of making these observations to you.

I am with the most profound respect,

Monseigneur,

Your most humble and most obedient servant

VAUDREUIL

A letter dated October 12, 1754, tells us that La Chauvignerie, with thirty men, had established a command in November, 1753, at Chiniqué, near the present location of Ambridge, Pennsylvania. At the time of La Chauvignerie's activity at this place, the site was occupied by a village of Indians known as the Chaouanons.

After Fort Le Boeuf was erected, Daniel de Joncaire pushed on to Venango (Franklin). Here he established residence in the house abandoned by John Fraser, who, told by Indians of the coming of the French, had fled to the comparative safety of the

Monongahela. Although the French had hoped to complete four fortifications in 1753, only Presque Isle and Le Boeuf were finished; yet with Joncaire at Venango and La Chauvignerie at Chiniqué, their command of the trail from Presque Isle to the Ohio River was almost complete.

Washington's Mission to Le Boeuf.

The French control of the Allegheny and upper Ohio valleys aroused Governor Dinwiddie and other colonial leaders to the realization that this French occupation was a menace to the eastern colonies and at the same time served the purpose of cutting off the opportunity for westward expansion. Consequently, in 1753, George Washington was sent by Governor Dinwiddie on his initial effort in public service, to protest the French advance from the lake to the Ohio.

At the time of Washington's journey to Le Boeuf, Joncaire and two other French officers were quartered at Venango in the house abandoned by Fraser. Washington and his party, among whom was Christopher Gist, a seasoned frontiersman, followed the wilderness trail from the forks of the Ohio to the Le Boeuf fort. The course which they took is preserved on a map drawn by Washington.

On this journey he met Joncaire at Venango. Joncaire was about forty-seven; Washington about twenty-one. In spite of the efforts of the French to place obstacles in his way, the future commander of the American army was not to be stopped.

The Frenchman, La Force, later held as hostage by the English, led Washington over the trail from Venango to Le Boeuf, where the message of Dinwiddie was delivered to Repentigny and St. Pierre. Washington's Journal indicates the danger which was attendant to his trip. The natural hazards of wilderness travel and the historic import of the message carried by Washington, combined to place a dramatic and memorable episode in the annals of the Venango Trail.

The distance between Fort Le Boeuf and Duquesne was too great for continuous march; and in the spring of 1754 Fort Machault was built at Franklin to serve as an intermediate station for convoys.

In April of the same year, Contrecoeur used the water route via the Allegheny to the forks of the Ohio river. His letter of November 28, 1755, tells us that he did not

. immediately march by land
to the said river [the Ohio]. It was
impossible for me to set out from there

[Niagara], on account of the bad roads and the severity of the Season, before the 16th of April of the same year [1754]. On arriving at Fort Duquesne which is the principal post of this river, I found an hostile fort there, which I immediately took after forcing the English within to surrender. I remained at Fort Duquesne till the 15th of the present month. . . ."

The latter portion of the above letter refers to the surrender of Ensign Ward at the forks of the Ohio where he had started a fort. After his surrender, this fort was completed by the French and named Fort Duquesne.

No longer did the French tentatively probe the wilderness. The Venango Trail became their frontier highway over which raced their messenger-post and over which moved their troops and supplies. With Fort Presque Isle and Fort Duquesne to guard the northern and southern ends and with the intermediate posts, the trail was a French possession.

Provisions and munitions of war came by boat to Fort Presque Isle, and from thence were taken down the Venango Trail to Forts Le Boeuf, Machault, and Duquesne. The importance of Presque Isle as the northern depot of the trail is shown by the reasons the French Governor gave in 1756, when he refused Lieutenant Benoist's request for a transfer from that post. Benoist was told that due to the complex movement of troops and supplies through Presque Isle, his efforts there served his country as well as though he were on the field of battle.

In the same letter, many orders and instructions concerning Presque Isle throw light upon the details of Benoist's duties. Presque Isle was a base for operations southward, where, at Fort Duquesne, Colonel Dumas looked to Benoist for the immediate delivery of supplies. As a junction point, Presque Isle was the meeting place for the forces from Niagara and the troops from the western post, Detroit. If Dumas had more Indian reinforcements than he needed, he could send them to Benoist at Presque Isle, to be transported to Niagara.

Although horses were used on the portage, the work was too heavy for them, and quickly killed them. Among Benoist's duties was the task of securing fresh horses. This was accomplished chiefly through the Ohio Indian tribes who may have raised some horses at this time but who stole most of them from English settlements and traders.

Vehicles.

At the time of the building of the first portage between Presque Isle and Le Boeuf in 1753, it is quite probable that a kind of drag or sledge-like vehicle, drawn by men or horses, was used.

It is also very likely that wheeled carts were used in transport work since, on July 13, 1754, De Lery records: "M. St. Blain left by land to take some horses to Fort Presque Isle." And the same journal, four days later (July 17), states that: "Wednesday, at seven o'clock seven boats left [for Presque Isle] loaded with carts, harness, equipment and barrels of flour."

Between the years 1753 and 1758 the French evidently cut a new road from Presque Isle to Le Boeuf. Denny's Journal of 1795 speaks of two routes to Presque Isle from Le Boeuf, and a letter of Colonel Henry Bouquet's, in 1760, refers to finding a new road cut by the French. The swampy condition of the original road no doubt influenced the construction of a new route and the De Lery Journal of 1754 tells us that one of Repentigny's duties was to have the roads repaired. Another entry of De Lery's Journal states ". . . [July] 26, Friday, [1754] twenty men from my brigade went to work on the portage road. . . ."

In 1756, one John Walker describes conditions along the Venango Trail. Walker had been captured at Patterson's Creek, Pennsylvania, by the French, and was taken through the woods to Fort Duquesne, where he was put in irons and held for five days; then, still in irons, he was taken in a bateau up the Ohio. On their way, his captors met 40 canoes bringing a war-party of Indians down from Lake Erie to Fort Duquesne, for the avowed purpose of raiding the Pennsylvania settlements. He was taken on to Fort Le Boeuf, by way of Venango, and from there hauled over the portage to Presque Isle in a cart. Here, as at the other French establishments, was found only a square log fort garrisoned by just a few men.

If Walker was transported over the road between Fort Presque Isle and Fort Le Boeuf in a cart, the French certainly must have greatly improved the condition of the trail since the time of its first use by Marin in 1753, three years prior to Walker's enforced journey.

Retreat to Venango.

General John Forbes' march on Fort Duquesne in November of 1758 was the culmination of many weary months of wilderness campaigning. Notified in March that he was to lead a huge force

against the French in the Ohio Valley region, Forbes made his way from Philadelphia to Carlisle. There, in July, he collected supplies for further efforts. Yet at Loyal Hannon in the second week in November he found himself at an impasse. Rains had ruined the road, and the movement of heavy troops was almost impossible. But a French soldier, captured near Loyal Hannon, revealed to Forbes the weak situation at Fort Duquesne, and he eagerly pushed onward to his objective.

Ligneris had replaced Dumas at Fort Duquesne in November of 1756. Two years later, with Forbes' army but one day's march away, he burned the fort, and left the forks of the Ohio to the English, retreating up the Venango Trail to Fort Machault. Ligneris had but eighty men at Machault and sent no less than four urgent appeals for aid to Joncaire who rallied as many Indians as possible to reinforce the French.

In April of 1759, orders were issued for a convergence of French forces at Fort Machault. Over the Venango Trail, from the Ohio valley and the Illinois country, French and Indians gathered under the command of Ligneris to block the English advance to Lake Erie. At the same time Presque Isle was to become a rendezvous for French and Canadian forces from the western posts and also serve as a base fort.

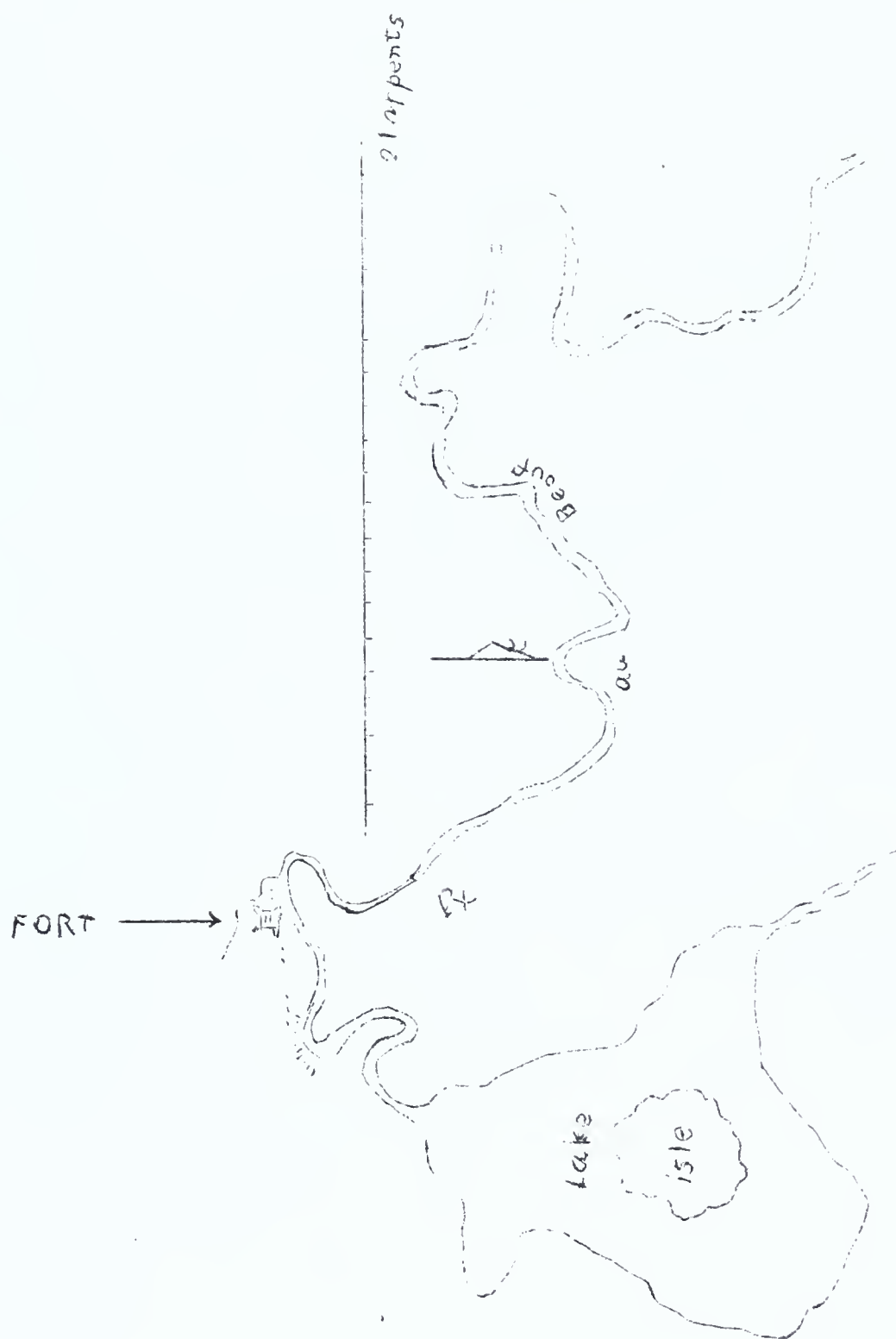
While the forces thus concentrated at Machault were awaiting the word to move against Fort Pitt, they were summarily ordered to the defence of Niagara.

In July 1759, an English expedition besieged Fort Niagara, and the capitulation of that fort was soon followed by the abandonment of the French forts along the Venango Trail. Forts Machault, Le Boeuf and Presque Isle were evacuated and burned in August of 1759.

De Lery Measurement of the Trail.

During the French occupation of the Venango Trail, the portage road between Presque Isle and Le Boeuf was measured by De Lery. His record of measurement follows:

. . . [July] 24th [1754], Wednesday, I left for Rivière au Boeuf, M. Péan told me to keep an eye on the work being done on the road, which I did both going and coming. Four soldiers followed me with an 18 foot measuring pole with which they measured the portage road. I found the Fort of the Rivière au Boeuf very small and that it could have been placed $4\frac{1}{2}$ arpents nearer, as will



Sketch of Lake Le Boeuf showing site of the fort.
(From De Lery's Journal, 1755)

be easily seen by the accompanying sketch of the river.

The length of the portage from Fort Presque Isle to Fort de la Rivière au Boeuf, in which is shown the distance of the most important places and bridges already built.

NAMELY

	Perches	Feet
From Fort Presque Isle to the 1st bridge-----	280	
Length of the bridge-----	3	
To a 2nd bridge-----	53	
To a hill-----	1204	
Height of said hill-----		9
Length of said hill-----	3	
To another hill-----	20	
Height of said hill-----		8
Length of said hill-----	3	
To the large hill of the Rivière au Gravois-----	108	
Height of said hill-----		13
Length of said hill-----	3	
Length of the bridge-----	8	
To the river-----	20	
Width of the river-----	4	
To the small bridge-----	13	
Length of said bridge-----	1	

To another bridge-----	329	
Length of said bridge-----	3	4
To the bridge at the shed-----	147	
Length of said bridge-----	2	4
To the small encampment-----	1400	
To the large camping place-----	325	
Length of the bridge at the large camping place---	2	
To another-----	3	
Length of said bridge-----	1	14
To another bridge-----	200	
Length of said bridge-----	1	9
To another bridge-----	65	
Length of said bridge-----	2	
To another-----	447	
Length of said bridge-----		13
To the turn-----	146	
To reach the fort along the Rivière au Boeuf-----	43	8
	<hr/> 4841	<hr/> 8

By the various measurements given, it is apparent that the portage from Presque Isle to Rivière au Boeuf, from the bastion of one fort to the other by the wagon road totals:

Leagues	Arpents	Perches	Feet
$5\frac{3}{4}$	1	1	8

A league is figured as 84 arpents, an arpent as ten perches of 18 feet, official measure, which makes 2520 toises.

I did not examine the character or condition of the ground on this portage. I believe, however, that to render it practicable from Rivière aux Gravois to within 190 toises of the Fort de la Rivière au Boeuf, it is necessary to bridge it all the way. I am aware that on this part of the road there are many places where one could not drain off the water without considerable work. M. de Rigauville went to resume his place at the camp. . . .

1937 Survey.

A route of the trail from Erie to Waterford was surveyed in 1937, and a comparison of the survey figures with the De Lery measurements provides an interesting study.

Two bridge locations, as measured by De Lery, were probably on Parade Street— one, about a mile from Fort Presque Isle; the other almost a thousand feet farther along. The length of the first "bridge" was about 54 feet, and was evidently not a true bridge, but logs laid across the route to facilitate travel.

A point-to-point record of the survey from Gore Road to Waterford, compared with De Lery's point-to-point measurement, apparently places the "Rivière au Gravois" in the vicinity of Walnut Creek, near Johnson Road. Another De Lery designation, "the bridge at the shed" is likely in the neighborhood of the intersection of Goddard Road and the trail.

In scanning the survey map of the trail, and in referring to both De Lery and modern measurements, it should be remembered that French linear measurement was not standardized at the time of De Lery, and that any opinion expressed regarding detailed comparison between the modern survey and that of De Lery is open to discussion.

So many considerations enter into any comparison of the route-distances, that a table of measurement is here presented for the purpose of clarification.

Footage Point-to-point	Survey Designations	Approximate running totals from Fort Presque Isle to given points
17,441.44	To Gore Road from Fort site	17,441.44
555.80	To Mill Creek	17,997.24
1,219.53	To East Edge of Shunpike	19,216.77
3,258.82	To Route 505	22,475.59
1,135.03	To Old Bridge	23,610.62
988.72	To West Edge of Shunpike	24,599.34
2,731.44	To 2nd Old Bridge	27,330.78
150.60	To Johnson Road	27,481.38
4,269.10	To Curtis Road	31,750.48
8,089.03	To Goddard Road	39,839.51
268.00	To North Edge of Bridge	40,107.51
4,562.55	To Lee Road	44,670.06
744.00	To North Edge of Creek	45,414.06
2,513.85	To North Edge of 10 Ft. Creek	47,927.91
2,052.25	To Donnell Road	49,980.16
3,946.15	To a 5 Ft. Creek	53,926.31
2,203.45	To Moore Road	56,129.76
5,331.70	To 1st Intersection, Rt. 19	61,461.46
12,869.90	To 2nd Meeting with Rt. 19	74,331.36
2,850.70	To Waterford (First Street)	77,182.06

De Lery's measurements will be found on pages 15 and 16. In the above table of the 1937-1938 survey, the lefthand column gives the footage between each point, while the righthand column is a running total.

4. The English on the Trail

From the capitulation of the French forts in 1759 until the summer of 1763, the English took an increasing interest in the Venango Trail, which was climaxed by the Bouquet Expedition of 1760. This expedition sought to make secure the English possessions along the frontier. Before this march from Pittsburgh to Presque Isle, the English had gained some definite information about the trail.

On March 17, 1759, Hugh Mercer reported the condition of the trail as described to him by Tom Bull, an Indian spy in the British employ. An excerpt from Mercer's communication reads:

. . . The Ohio is clear of Ice at Wenango, and the French Creek is clear to La Buf [.] The Road is broad and good from Wenango to La Buf, and from thence to Friscile about half a Day's Journey is very low and Swampy and Bridged Almost [the] whole way. . . .

Bouquet's expedition was prefaced by many similar letters, including another from Mercer, dated April 24th, 1759, which mentions the coming campaign. On August 20, 1759, after the French had abandoned the remaining forts, Mercer outlined a plan to march a force up the trail to Presque Isle, where it would be met by boats sent from Fort Niagara. This plan followed a suggestion made by Sir William Johnson, that the Venango Trail be used in linking the English system of lake forts with their post at the forks of the Ohio river where Fort Pitt had replaced the French Fort Duquesne. To use the trail, it was necessary to have information concerning it. This knowledge was gained, in part, through the journeys made by Charles Lee, and by Patterson and Hutchins.

Captain Lee's journey was made from Niagara to Pittsburgh by way of Lake Erie, the Presque Isle Portage, French Creek and the Allegheny. Lee had come to Niagara from Oswego, and had with him only fourteen men. Since his trip was made soon after the fall of Niagara, it would appear that his party was in apparent danger from roving French and Indians; but in the opinion of Sir William Johnson, Lee had nothing to fear from the enemy.

Writing of the portage from Presque Isle to "Le Beuf", Lee says: ". . . a very bad Road, being almost a Continued Swamp, bridged on by logs. . ."

At "Le Beuf", Lee built rafts for transportation down French Creek to the Allegheny. His party met with misadventure -- the raft upset, and ". . . we lost the greatest Part of our Ammunition, all our Provisions and Necessaries, went ashore, and encamped there. . ."

Lee's journal contains an obviously incorrect estimate of the mileage via the water route to Fort Pitt:

From Niagara to Presqu Ile-----231 Computed Miles

From Presqu Ile to le Boeuf----- 21

From Le Boeuf to Venango-----172

From Venango to Pittsburgh-----140

Total 563 Miles.

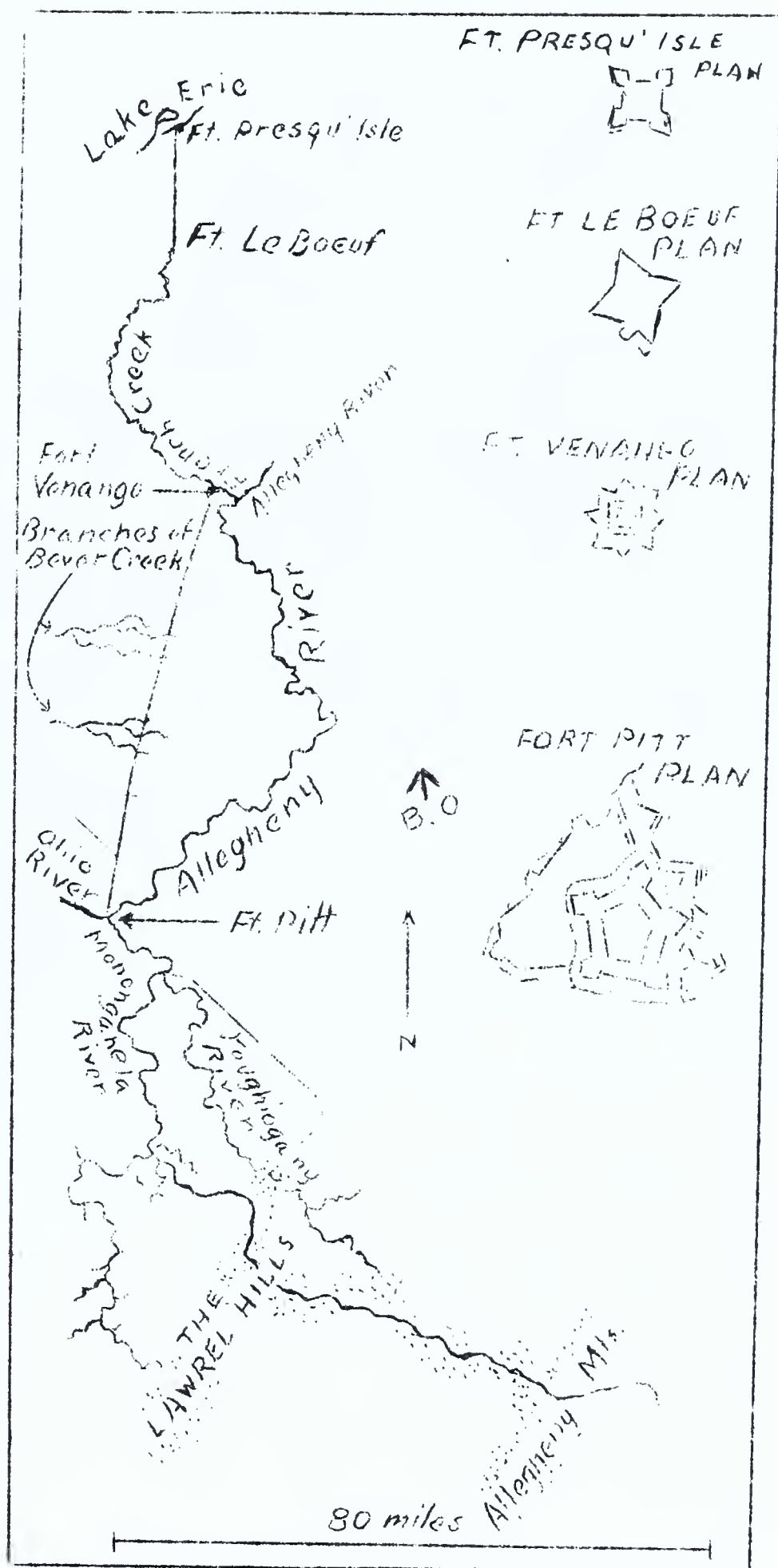
This summary is in the handwriting of Colonel Bouquet and bears out the assumption that his data regarding distances in the upper trail region was inadequate.

Among the difficulties faced by the English in their occupation of western Pennsylvania and the lakes region was the problem of troop and supply movement. The successful maintenance of their possessions on the frontier depended upon the use of the Venango Trail, but, until the journey of Patterson and Hutchins in 1759, their knowledge of the trail and its advantages was vague and not clearly defined.

It is apparent that Captain Patterson's ability as a guide and scout was fully appreciated by General Stanwix; for in a letter dated September 16th, 1759, we find his proposal to send Patterson "with an Indian or two" to Presque Isle. When the trip was actually made, Patterson was accompanied by Thomas Hutchins, whose knowledge of wilderness trails may be indicated by the fact that he later became Geographer General of the United States.

From the nature of Patterson and Hutchins' Journal of October 5th, 1759, it is evident that their instructions were to secure all possible details relating to the condition of the trail. Frequent notes on fording places, swamps, hills, high and low ground, the distance marched in a day and other information bearing directly on the utility of the Venango Trail as a route of march, makes the Journal a general source of data.

The Journal gives the distance from Pittsburgh to Presque Isle as one hundred and twenty-one miles. In this Journal many notes are made concerning the terrain crossed. Between Pittsburgh and



SKETCH OF LIEUTENANT ELIAS MEYER'S MAP

Sandy Creek, the Journal notes:

. . . marched thr'o a Rich Bottom well
Timber'd with Hickery and Ash, this days
March the Land in Some Places tolerable
good. . . The land is but thin and Chiefly
Timber'd with Oak and Chestnut, then 12
Miles to the Top of a ridge near 80 Yards
high, had a Steep descent to Lacauomecau,
or Sandy Creek. . . a good Fording. . .

Their route changed of necessity and the Journal states:

. . . Crossed the Creek 15 Yards wide, but
as the Road does not go this way, we being
obliged by the highth of the Waters to go
this side, I need say no more. . . the same
Day Marched a Mile where we came into the
Right Road. . .

South of Le Boeuf:

. . . then 5 Miles thr'o a Pini Swamp at
the end of which we Crossed French Creek,
impossible for Carriages to Cross this
Swamp except it be Bridged all the way. . .

From Le Boeuf to Presque Isle.

. . . Began our March N 30 E for Prisquisle.
Proceeded 15 Miles thr'o a level Pine Swamp
the Road is Bridged better than 10 Miles, a-
bout half a way from LeBeauf to Prisquisle
a creek [.] another Creek within three Miles
Prisquisle [.] about 3 oClock arrived at the
Fort at Lake Erie where we found Prisquisle
in Ruins. . .

. . . The Distance from Pittsburgh to Prisquisle
is 121 Miles.

There can be little doubt that Bouquet found this in-
formation useful in his own expedition of 1760.

Bouquet.

Bouquet's expedition had for its immediate purpose the reformation of the Venango Trail. To this end, his operations included the rebuilding of Forts Venango (Machault), Le Boeuf and Presque Isle. Fort Presque Isle received the greatest attention as to fortifications since, in the English plan of occupation, Le Boeuf and Venango were to be used only as stop-over or relay depots for supplies.

In his Journal, Bouquet mentions a "Waggon Road" south of Le Boeuf:

. . . . then crossed a Branch of French Creek into a fine Meadow near a Mile Sq. from whence we had a good Waggon Road two Miles thro' flat open Woods to Le Boeuf, which stands on a small Branch of French Creek over which is a very good Bridge. . . .

The Journal entry for July 17th reads:

. . . This days March [from Le Boeuf to Presque Isle] was (two Miles open dry Woods near Presque Isle, and one Mile at the other End excepted) a Continued Chestnut Bottom or swamp near nine Miles of which are laid with Logs. but much out of Repairs. Marched this day 14 Miles; . . .

. . . Our Course North from Fort Pitt to Wenango	81 $\frac{1}{2}$
From Wenango to Le Boeuf	46
From Le Boeuf to Presque Isle	15
	<hr/>
	142 $\frac{1}{2}$ Miles.

A deviation in the route of the Venango Trail is mentioned in the Aspinwall Papers. A letter from Colonel Bouquet to Monckton, dated August 11, 1760, indicates the French had cut new routes other than the original:

. . . The logs of the Causeway to Le Boeuf are troublesome for Horses, but better than the swamps under them. It would be a Work above our strength to Smooth it. We will

do what we can to it. The Horses we sent for Nails went and came very well.

The letter bears a postscript:

P. S. Our scouts have just discovered a new Road to Le Boeuf cut by the French, much better than the others, it is on the right hand in coming here.

Pontiac.

The Indians had been under the impression that the West would finally be free of white intruders, once the English had succeeded in vanquishing the French. But the westward movement of settlers and the construction of forts checked this hope of the Indians, and the war-fire blazed along the frontier. A confederacy of most of the older Northwest tribes allied themselves under the leadership of Pontiac, and, in June of 1763, the war whoop echoed down the old Venango Trail.

Guyasutha, foremost among Pontiac's border generals, was very likely in command of the savages in northwestern Pennsylvania. Although he had accompanied Washington on the famous trip to Le Boeuf, his hand was now turned against the English.

The Indians struck with devastating force at Forts Presque Isle, Le Boeuf and Venango. Tales of this outburst against the English reek with the bloody tactics employed by the savages in their uprising along the frontier, as the warriors aroused by Pontiac ranged over the Venango Trail.

While Forts Le Boeuf and Venango were not considered of sufficient importance to receive large garrisons or supplies, Fort Pitt, controlling the river approaches, and Presque Isle, commanding the approach to Niagara and the upper lake region, had been more carefully constructed.

At dawn on June 20, 1763, the Indians attacked Fort Presque Isle. Ensign Christie's ultimate surrender to the Indians aroused the astonishment of Bouquet, who had personally supervised the construction of Presque Isle. However, from the accounts given of Christie's defeat, it appears he believed that utter annihilation was the only alternative.

At Le Boeuf, Ensign Price and his beleaguered men were cornered in a small, poorly-fortified building. The scarcity of ammunition, with much of the powder wet, added to the dismal outlook. Under cover of darkness, they managed to escape, and

guided by one of their number fled toward Venango. Morning found them less than two miles from Le Boeuf, since they had only wandered in confusion during the night. Finally on the trail, they reached the fort at Venango only to find it abandoned. The grim evidence of charred bodies proved it to be another conquest of the savage. Eventually, Price and a few survivors reached the safety afforded by Fort Pitt, but their panic-stricken flight down the Venango Trail, with war-painted death prowling the forest on every side, can only be imagined.

Of the fall of Venango, it is related that Gordon, the commander, was forced by the Indians to write out a list of the English transgressions against the savages, and was repaid by death over a slow fire.

In a letter dated August 28, 1763, to Major Gladwin, Colonel Bouquet stated:

I pity the unfortunate who Yet remain in the Power of the Barbarians; as every Step we take to rescue them, may and will probably hasten their Death. . . . we had Intelligence that Venango had been Surpris'd. Lieutenant Gordon and all his unfortunate Garrison Masacred: Le Boeuf, Benson's, and Presque Isle Surrendered to my unspeakable astonishment, as I Knew the Strength of that Block house, which would have been reliev'd from Niagara. . . .

After 1763, the Venango Trail lost importance, and was used, in the punitive expeditions of 1764, mainly for Indian messenger service. The forts along the trail were not rebuilt by the English; due to their new policy of retrenchment and economy, and during the years 1765-1773 the trail became, once more, a wilderness path, used chiefly by the Indians. The upper region was almost deserted by early frontiersmen, and the road known so well to French and English fell into disrepair, becoming, as we learn from later journals, grown up with tangled underbrush, blotted out by rains, and finally blended into the wilderness from which it had been carved.

5. Early American Use of Trail.

Daniel Brodhead's expedition through the trail region in 1779, a result of the constant Indian raids upon the frontier, had for its purpose the subjection of the Iroquois and the breaking of the power of the Confederacy. This was accomplished by destroying not only their homes but their means of sustenance also.

With this expedition, the trail began to assume a new importance on the frontier. Early Americans recognized it as an artery of communication to the Lakes, and over it came the first settlers of northwestern Pennsylvania.

Brodhead's report to Washington of September 16, 1779, mentions that he utilized a part of the Venango route.

. . . On my return I preferred the Venango Road, [passing] the towns of Conawago, Buckloons and Mahusquechikoken, about 20 Miles above Venango, on French Creek, . . .

Brodhead's expedition took him through what is now Warren, Pennsylvania, and down the Allegheny to Franklin. From that point he would follow the course of the main Venango Trail to Fort Pitt.

Surprisingly little knowledge of the Venango Trail was to be had in 1782 when General William Irvine wrote to Washington of the difficulty which he experienced in securing detailed information of the region:

Sir:- I did not receive your excellency's letter of the 22d of March until two days ago. I shall observe your directions respecting the roads, etc., leading to Niagara. As yet, I have not been able to fall in with any person who has even a tolerable knowledge of them. There has been very little communication with that quarter since last war; and few of the people who were then employed are now living. Several of the officers who went with Colonel Brodhead, in 1779, up the Alleghany, say they marched about one hundred and seventy miles to a creek called Connewango. They were informed that it took its rise about 30 miles from that place in a small lake; that, at this lake,

the waters divided; other small streams run out of it towards Niagara, and that thence the country was pretty level and neither rivers nor morasses of any consequence in the way. As far as Col. Brodhead went, it was almost impassable either by water or land. The greater part of the way along the river was one continued defile. They went in September, at that season, it was with difficulty they got up some small canoes, and this on the main branch of the Alleghany. They took pack horses along. Some say they were at one time not more than 30 miles from General Sullivan's line of march, or rather I believe the extreme point he marched to.

I have it in report from officers and others, that French Creek from Venango to Le Boeuf is so full of timber that it would take great labor to clear it, and that in the summer season, it is a very small stream. From Le Boeuf to Presqu' Isle, the old bridged road is entirely rotten and under water. These gentlemen assert that it would be easier to make a new road than to repair the old one. By these accounts, it appears almost impracticable to march any but light troops without artillery or heavy stores or baggage. I will, however, continue to get the best accounts in my power and transmit them to your excellency. . . .

Yet, despite the lack of information, the Venango Trail region received in the same year, 1782, recognition by no less a personage than Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's remarks concerning the region are noteworthy:

The Allegheny River, with a slight swell, affords navigation for light batteaux to Venango, at the mouth of French Creek, where it is two hundred yards wide, and is practised even to Le Boeuf, from whence there is a portage of fifteen miles to Presque Isle on the Lake Erie.

In a later addition, in the appendix, it is stated:

Besides the three channels of communication mentioned between the western waters and the Atlantic, there are two others to which the Pennsylvanians are turning their attention; one from Presque Isle on Lake Erie, to Le Boeuf,

down the Allegheny to Kiskiminitas then up the Kiskiminitas, and from thence, by a small portage, to Juniata, which falls into the Susquehanna. . . considering the enterprising temper of the Pennsylvanians. . . it is not improbable but [this] communication will be open and improved.³

Captain Hart's Fort at Franklin.

In 1787 American Fort Franklin was built by Captain Jonathan Hart. Its site differed from that of the English fort because of the natural disadvantages of the earlier site. Denny's Journal for May 3, 1788, gives an account of his visit to the fort, where the command was reviewed, mentioning also that many Seneca Indians were to be found in the vicinity of the fort.

The erection of this fort was intended as an aid to the settlement of the area. When General William Irvine explored the Donation Lands in 1785, he found a section of the Venango Trail of inestimable value to his purpose. In his report, he remarks that the French were believed to have actually measured the trail; the De Lery measurement supports this statement. We know the French did at least measure, foot by foot, the portage from Presque Isle to La Boeuf.

The Irvine excerpt is here given:

[August, 1785] In exploring the donation land, I began on the Line run by Mr. McLane, between that and the tracts appropriated for redeeming depreciation certificates which he ascertained by a due North Line to be near thirty miles from Fort Pitt, and by the common computation along the path leading from Fort Pitt to Venango on the mouth of French Creek, which some affirm was actually measured by the French when they possessed that country. I found it forty miles; East of this path along Mr. McLane's Line for five or six miles, the land is pretty level, well watered with small springs, and of tolerable quality, but from thence to the Allegheny River, which is about Twenty-five miles due East, there is no land worth mentioning fit for cultivation; as far as French Creek all between the Venango Path and the Allegheny

³ The writings of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. II, pp. 19, 263.

there is very little land fit for cultivation, as it is a continued chain of high barren mountains except small breaches for Creeks and Rivulets to disemogue themselves into the River. . . .⁴

1788, Founding of Meadville.

Meadville, one of the oldest towns on French Creek, was founded by David Mead in May of 1788. Mead and the few pioneers who had accompanied him from Northumberland county first made camp near the mouth of Mill Run where it flowed into French Creek. In 1789 Mead erected a saw mill, and for many years the designation "Mead's Mill" referred to this historic site.

Denny's Journal of 1794 refers to Mead's settlement — "the only place where a settlement has been attempted this side of Pittsburg." In 1795 a survey of the town was made by David Mead, Dr. T. R. Kennedy and Major Roger Alden. The Venango Trail, before and after the laying out of the town, was the main thoroughfare of Meadville and later developed into a business street and a place of residence.

On April 8, 1793, an Act was passed for laying out a town at Presque Isle. William Irvine and Andrew Ellicott were appointed Commissioners. However, a renewed Indian outbreak threatened the frontier, and the survey of the town site was, of necessity, suspended.

Captain Ebenezer Denny was ordered to Presque Isle in 1794 to protect the Commissioners and settlers. His Journal while on the march over the Venango Trail affords a clear view of the hazards of the time. Important among the Journal entries is one that tells of driving twenty-two head of cattle over the trail; another entry speaks of a subordinate bringing thirteen head of "very small cattle"; again, "ten horse loads of flour and whiskey."

As to the number of men under Denny's command, near the end of the Journal an entry reads: "Our number the same as when we set out. . . . [116]."

From Pittsburgh Denny marched his company and twenty-two cattle to Fort Franklin (Franklin, Pa.) and on to Cussewago (Meadville). It is twenty-nine miles from Franklin to Meadville. He notes that he forded "Big Sugar Creek" waist deep, and that he marched twelve miles. We can but picture that entire march; the men plowing through the fords, the cattle straying, the ever present fear of Indian ambush. Yet Denny tersely records:

The cattle strayed. Did not get all until eleven o'clock. Marched twelve miles. The country very level and rich.

Denny's notes regarding the trail are numerous. The march takes them through pine swamps and bad roads. Seven miles below Le Boeuf he finds the country beautiful and "the road good." He records the distance between Franklin and Fort Le Boeuf, by way of Cussewago, as about fifty-five miles. He adds:

. . . the first part may be made good, but the other will be very difficult until the country is opened. A direct road north from Franklin to Le Boeuf; it is said, will not exceed forty-five miles; but it is yet uncertain what kind of a road that route will afford.

Denny arrived at Le Boeuf with less than twenty miles between his party and Presque Isle, but had received orders from the Governor to suspend the march. It was feared that an armed force such as Denny's, at Presque Isle, would precipitate serious Indian trouble; and from July until October the Captain and his men remained at Le Boeuf.

Among arrivals and departures over the trail he records a visit from a delegation sent by the Six Nations from the Buffalo Council. Denny's Journal also notes arrival and departure of messengers -- "the express."

Sent Lieutenant Murphy, the quartermaster, a sergeant and fifteen men, with a six ox team, to bring up our other twelve pounder from where it was left, seven miles below on the creek. They returned in the afternoon.

No doubt there was great speculation among Denny's detachment as to Presque Isle and what might be found there. Held as they were at Le Boeuf, only sixteen short miles from sight of the legendary waters of Lake Erie, the men grew restive, as we learn from the Journal, and the name of Presque Isle must have been a challenge to any soldier's mind.

The lure of the unknown proved too much for Artilleryman Sherman Morrow, and the following entries from the Journal are enlightening:

. . . 17 [August, 1794]. Sherman Morrow, of the artillery, missing: supposed to have deserted. . . .

18th. Sent a party in search of Morrow;
found no trace of him.

19th. A further search made, but no trace
or sign.

20th. Set in to rain very early. . . Morrow
came in about two o'clock, Says he was lost;
traveled to Lake Erie, was at Presque Isle. . . .

Denny reports that he received a supply of cattle, "but miserably poor." David Mead, at the Cussewago settlement, begged for protection and Denny sent "a trusty corporal and twelve men to remain there."

Denny's report of his eventual trip to Presque Isle is here given.

October 18th, [1794(. Set out with twelve men, accompanied by Mr. Ellicott, on a visit to Presqu' Isle. Went by what is called the grubbed road. It seems that after the French had opened the Indian path from Presqu' Isle to Le Boeuf, and wagoned considerably upon it, they found that it was some miles about, and that they had commenced the road upon a wrong plan; that it would take more labor to keep it in repair than would open one upon a straight line, notwithstanding, near five miles was crossway'd, and no road can be had from the lake to French creek with less. However, the direct course was found, and they began with cutting it out forty feet in width, which was pursued from the ford on Mill creek all the way to Le Boeuf. They also erected several large bridges, thirty, forty, fifty feet in length, across hollow ways and deep runs, overlaid with puncheons about eighteen feet long. But there does not appear to have been any cross-way done. Though it will certainly want as much as the old road, yet there has been a vast deal of digging. The course being straight, the way unavoidably led up and down every little precipice that presented, but all these were leveled; every point and sidling ground was made easy, and is still so. But the bridging has decayed and fallen down in the centre. But what appears the most extraordinary is the grubbing. The country through is covered with a vast deal of heavy timber, notwithstanding

every tree, from one end to the other, has been taken up by the roots and rolled out. However, it does not appear that ever they made use of this road; for when the trees were taken up the holes were yet so deep as to make it bad for a horse. No doubt the road was intended for a grand way. It is now grown up with small wood, but the largest to be seen does not exceed six inches. It is supposed that eight men could cut out a mile in a day. After that there must be a cross-way of four or five miles, and some of the old bridges repaired, the root holes filled; in places ditching would be very serviceable. The distance is between ten and twelve miles. We left Le Boeuf about eight o'clock and were at Presqu' Isle about two. Spent the afternoon along the lake and looking round the old fort. The situation grand. A perfect seaboard prospect, and one of the most beautiful. The bank along the lake is high and dry, perhaps about forty feet. Six or eight feet of the bottom is a slate rock. For a mile and a half, the country round the fort has been cleared, but is now grown up with young chestnut timber. Even within the fort the brush is so thick that it is difficult passing. There have been very fine gardens here; parsnips, currant bushes and many other things growing wild. The old fort a regular pentagon; about one thousand feet round the parapet, overlooking and commanding the basin or harbor, and affording a boundless view of the lake. It has been a handsome but light work; neither ditch nor parapet are sufficiently large. Five feet is about the base and height. The ditch perhaps three feet, and four in width. There must have been some other defense, pickets or fraising. The walls of the magazine are yet good, and the well wants nothing but cleaning out. The chimneys of the houses, some brick, others stone, are still standing; and the walls of a stone house, down by the old mill, are yet tolerable good. . .

In reading the following account, we note that the route of the return journey is not the same as the one taken the preceding day. We also discern much of interest in Denny's remarks as to the climate, and its effects on agriculture.

19th. Left Presqu' Isle about seven o'clock. Returning by the old cart road. Got back to

Le Boeuf about two o'clock. The old road appears now to be dryer than the grubbed one. Indeed in many places where the cross-waying is, the ground does not appear to want it. The country upon both roads is wet; will make fine grazing farm. Many excellent plantations might be made. There is a variety of soil and timber. Some places and large bottoms, are as rich as any land that can be found; the timber, walnut, sugar tree and shellbark hickory. But the greater part is middling, except for pasture; the timber, hemlock or spruce, pine, and beech. Along the lake, for two or three miles back, the country is high and dry, a light soil, chestnut and oak of large growth. Although we had severe frosts at Le Boeuf since the middle of last month, and almost constant, we could not discover that there had been any at Presqu'Isle, at least nothing appeared touched, not even the pea vine. This temperature of the weather must be owing to the large body of water which had received in the summer a degree of heat not easily chilled; consequently until that warmth in the lake is overcome, the air around will be influenced and kept temperate. The same cause is operating now upon the air. On the contrary, in the spring, keeps back the season and all vegetation. It is from this cause, I suppose, that apple orchards and some other fruits are so certain upon the lakes. Letters from Pitt inform us that in August General Wayne had given the western Indians a severe drubbing. This will be very apt to quiet the Six Nations, the instigations of the British to the contrary notwithstanding. . . .

Grubb and Rochfontaine.

A year after the journey of Denny to Presque Isle, a military force was located there to protect early settlers and to aid in laying out the town. Among the leaders of this Presque Isle Expedition of 1795 were Captain John Grubb and Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Rochfontaine. Throughout the early settlement days of Erie, Captain Grubb was active in the civic development of the new town, and his name is found with those of Nicholson, McCreary and Caughney as being among the first settlers of Mill Creek Township.

From the military records of "Lakeside Camp" printed in the Erie Dispatch of May 15, 1904, it is evident that small difficulties among the soldiers continually annoyed the command. A military court was established over which Captain Grubb presided;

except in the more severe breaches of discipline, military punishment was not meted out. Rochfontaine was in command of the engineering division, and aided greatly in the work under way. A regulation governing boats was made August 5, 1795:

. . . Boats going out or coming in are to be reported at the commissioner's marque, . . . the names of the passengers and articles on board must be enumerated in the report. . . .

6. Evolution of Modern Highways

The Venango Trail was the prototype of all the modern north-south highways between Erie, Waterford, Meadville, Franklin and Pittsburgh. Even though modern routes seldom coincide with the course of the original, the Venango Trail from Erie to Pittsburgh has proved its utility alike to the Indians, the French, the English and early American settlers.

Hunting trail, trade trail, and from Erie to Waterford, portage path, the Venango Trail served successively the frontier and modern transportation. As a military route, it served both French and English. Reclaimed from the wilderness in 1795, it aided settlement in northwestern Pennsylvania.

While highways between Erie and Pittsburgh have sought other routes, the evolution of the modern highway from the Venango Trail is quite clearly discernible. It may be regarded as the norm or average from which the later north-south routes of western Pennsylvania have deviated.

Legislation.

Andrew Ellicott, one of the Commissioners appointed to lay out the town at Presque Isle, reported to Governor Mifflin on Dec. 30, 1794, concerning the development of Franklin and Waterford, which is called Le Boeuf in Ellicott's letter:

. . . Shortly after the works [at Le Boeuf] were rendered defensible, your communication of the 13th of June last [1794] came to hand, by which it appeared that my continuance for some time in that country was deemed necessary. I then began, with the aid of an assistant, to execute the plan of a town in the public reservation at le Boeuf, the design of which I had mentioned to you in my communication of

the 4th of July last. The situation is certainly one of the best in this State, being at the head of the navigation of French creek, and where the carrying place to Presqu'Isle must commence. A number of lots are already improved; and that in such a manner as would have come within the law for securing lots to the improvers at Presqu'Isle. The ground on which the Town is laid out is level, dry, and gravelly, and abounds with several excellent springs of water. The land surrounding the Town is of the first quality for meadows and grass lots. A plan of the town will accompany this. The exploring [of] a road which was discovered when we were running the northern Boundary of this State in 1787, appeared to me an object of no small importance. I, therefore, made use of the first safe opportunity for that purpose. The road appears to have commenced at Presqu'Isle and carried on almost in a direct line to Le Boeuf. It is opened thirty feet wide, and all the trees taken out by the roots, except about a distance of thirty perches at the south end. The bridges have been generally completed, but no part of the cause-waying attempted, from which circumstance it appears never to have been travelled by wheel carriages. The road which had been used is very crooked and narrow, and was probable no other than the Indian path improved. But neither of these roads can be made to answer any valuable purpose without several miles of cause-waying, except in the winter and two or three months in the summer, if the season should be dry. The expense and exertions of the French and British in that part of the country is one among the many proofs of the great value and importance it was thought to be of by those nations. . . .

The last sentence of the above paragraph is ample evidence that Ellicott was aware of the importance of the upper Venango trail area.

. . . . If it should be thought necessary to keep up the posts on the Allegany River; and French Creek, and extend an establishment to Presqu'Isle, which is certainly an object of the first importance to this State, as well as to the U. S. [,] I would recommend the

following arrangement for ensuring the necessary supplies: A contractor to be stationed at Pittsburgh, and a person, under his direction, at Venango, to receive the Provision and other stores. The transportation between those posts can be performed by the Delaware, or Susquehanna long boats, except in the dry part of the season, when recourse must be had to those built upon the Mohawk, or Schenactady, plan. From Venango to le Boeuf, the latter ought only to be calculated upon. At le Boeuf another store keeper should be stationed. From le Boeuf to Presqu'Isle, a distance of little more than fifteen miles, the transportation should be performed by oxen. Wet and swampy countries soon destroy pack horses, which, in all our western expeditions, has considerably increased the expense. The boating, and all other business relative to the transportation of supplies, should be performed by the military, which would not only produce a considerable saving, but constitute several necessary checks on the different departments. . . .

On my way home, I examined the state of the contracts for opening a road from the east side of the Allegany Mountain to the Nine Mile-run west of the Chestnut Ridge, and reported my opinion upon that subject the 20th of this instant. . . .

Commissioners were appointed to lay out a road from Reading to Presque Isle, and later they wrote to Governor Mifflin stating that they had not only examined the ground, but had actually cut a bridle path "on the rout or course to Reading." This path was cut from Waterford in a general southeast direction to Hickory Town on the Allegheny, a distance of about forty miles.

Pittsburgh, Oct. 27th 1795.

Your letter of the 25th of September met us at Franklin on o[u]r return from Cuniwango - Exploring ground for a road from Reading to Presqu'Isle, having been charged on us by your commission of long standing, but could not be entered on sooner, we thought we could

not spend a few days better than in examining the ground from Le Boeuf to the Allegheny River; accordingly we not only explored, but actually cut a way commonly called a Bridle road or path directly on the rout or course to Reading - we found the ground generally good, no marshes, few hills, except near the River, very little bridging necessary - we were only four days, the distance not quite forty miles we came on the river about three miles above Hickorytown - of the whole ground between Reading and Presqu'isle there remains now to be explored only from Hickorytown on the Allegheny to the Bald Eagles nest, on a branch of the Susquehanna.

We arrived at this place on the 23d instant, after having completed all the business assigned us, the time may seem long, but the work was great, and you may rest assured that not a moment was lost except the casual delay, which we have already mentioned - all the surveyors and indeed every person under our orders laboured steadily and very hard - a considerable time must unavoidably elapse before fair copies of the plans of all the towns can be prepared for you.

Your most obedient Servants

Wm. I[rvine] and Andrew Ellicott

to Gov. Mifflin

A letter in 1736 from Governor Mifflin to Joseph Ellicott, who replaced Andrew Ellicott in the survey for laying out roads, contains fairly accurate proof that as new roads were built, they followed the routes of the older thoroughfares.

Whereas in and by an Act of the General assembly entitled, 'An Act for laying out and opening, sundry Roads within this Commonwealth and for other purposes,' it is among other things, provided

and declared, that the Governor shall be empowered and required to appoint three persons as Commissioners to view the ground and estimate the expense of opening and making a good waggon road from the Bald Eagles Nest, or the end of the Nittany Mountain, to the town of Erie, at Presqu-isle, and to cause the Said Road to be surveyed, and staked out by the most practicable route and also to cause a draught of the survey to be made in profile; and report to the Legislature the several parts of the expense that will be incurred in each County, thro' which the said road will pass - Provided that the Commissioners thus appointed shall not stake out any part of the said road, when it may be carried on Roads heretofore laid out and opened, agreeably to the provisions of former laws of this State. And Whereas in pursuance of the power and authority given and granted in and by the said recited act of assembly William Irvine, Andw[.] Ellicott and George Wilson on the thirteenth day of April last were appointed Commissioners for the purpose aforesaid:- but Andrew Ellicott, Esquire, hath since resigned the said appointment, and his resignation hath [been] accepted. . . 5

A contract regarding early road building, made between Governor Mifflin and John Nicholson in 1794, helps us to understand why French Creek trade for a time kept pace with road traffic.

A Contract was this Saturday March 8, 1794 concluded between the Governor; and John Nicholson, esquire, for opening and improving a road from French Creek to Presqueisle on Lake Erie; and a 'contract between Gov. and Nicholson' for improving the navigation of French Creek from its mouth to the Portage; leading to Presqueisle on Lake Erie. . . . the said John Nicholson . . . to . . . receive the sum of eight hundred pounds as full compensation for All his services and Expenses in executing this Contract. . . .

Early Transportation

Wagons of the Conestoga type, long-bodied and sturdy vehicles able to withstand the gruelling mountain roads, were

among the first American conveyances in use on the old-time highways. The stage coach, the pack train of horses and mules, were other methods.

Prior to 1812, early mail routes linked Erie and Pittsburgh. In fact, as early as 1808, Mail Route No. 161 connected Pittsburgh with Presque Isle, weekly, via Butler, Mercer, Meadville, and Le Boeuf; and in 1832, a contract was made by the J. B. Curtis and Company of Mercer to carry the mail from Pittsburgh to Erie daily, in a four-horse post chaise. The distance is noted as 128 miles, but a close scanning of routes between those points causes some doubt as to the accuracy of the mileage. A comparison of routes indicates that the figure should be nearer 140 miles.

Methods of travel, from the carts used by the French to the advent of the locomotive, included pack trains, made up of from ten to one hundred horses. The pack train was used to transport government stores, and required at times a guard of fifty soldiers. The pack horse, in turn, was replaced by the Conestoga wagon and the stage coach. River traffic kept pace with overland travel, and in fact far surpassed it for a time.

French Creek

"The Navigator", a handbook or manual of river navigation, published in 1817, contains many interesting facts concerning French Creek, the Allegheny and the Ohio. No less interesting are the comments in the text regarding Erie and the Venango Trail area.

This town [Erie] is handsomely situated on the south bank of Lake Erie, opposite the Peninsula, which runs several miles into the lake; forming between it and the town, a handsome harbour for vessels, though it is somewhat difficult to enter. Erie was laid out a few years since (1797-8, I think,) by the state of Penn. and from its commanding situation, must in time become a place of considerable business. It is increasing in buildings and business and is the seat of justice for Erie county, in lat. N. 42° 21' about 120 miles N. of Pittsburgh. The old fort just below the town, which contains the venerable remains of the late General Anthony Wayne, (who died here, Dec. 14, 1796, on his return from his campaign against the Indians,) is totally evacuated. The country in its vicinity is settling rapidly; and that trade in salt of which there are about 7000

or 8000 barrels enter that port annually, is increasing. The convenience of the turnpike road erected between Erie and Waterford, a portage of 15 miles, is very considerable.

Erie has a post-office, several mercantile stores and public inns, and a number of mechanical branches are carried on with spirit. The town is well supplied with fish from the lake, and cranberries from the peninsula, of which many barrels are sold at the Pittsburgh market yearly. The advantage that Erie has from the trade of Detroit, and the northern lakes, with that of the St. Lawrence and the Mohawk rivers, added to the easy communications to it from the different parts of the Ohio, are certainly very great, and must eventually add importance to the place, and riches to the country around it.

The salt trade at the port of Erie was heavy and the figures of Thomas Foster, collector of the port, shows that 263,880 bushels of salt were handled from 1800 to 1809. The "Navigator" continues:

. . . WATERFORD, (FORT LE BOEUF,)

This town is situated on the north side of French creek, and is the nearest and best point of communication between that creek and Erie; and it is here where goods are deposited to be ready for transportation either over the portage or down the creek. A frontier post was kept here till the peace with the Indians in 1796. It is now destroyed. It has a post office, several mercantile stores, warehouses, public inns, &c., and is 15 miles south of Erie, in Erie county.

MEADVILLE,

This town stands on the E. or left hand side of French creek, is the seat of justice for Crawford county, Penn. has several mercantile stores, public inns, a post and printing office, which issues a weekly paper, and from its central situation, in the heart of a rich and fertile

country, it will no doubt become a place of considerable business. It has a well regulated school, a fixed preacher, and a society for the encouragement of home manufactures. It is about 86 miles north of Pittsburgh.

FRANKLIN,

This is the seat of justice for Venango county, Penn. situated on the right or W. side of French creek, a little above the junction of it with the Allegheny river. It is bounded by large and stony hills on both sides. It progresses but slowly, and the country around is but thinly settled. The French formerly kept a garrison here, which is now destroyed, but is said to have a brass piece of ordnance of considerable value buried in its ruins. It is about 63 miles northward of Pittsburgh.

PITTSBURGH,

Here you may land below the wharf on the Allegheny or turning the point, ascend the Monongahela, and land at any of its wharves. The shores of either river are dry and gravelly, but in high water the Monongahela affords from the gentleness of its current, the safest harbour, and is the most convenient to the centre of the town.

From the Erie Gazette of Thursday, March 25, 1830, we learn of the importance of French Creek trade:

Trade of French Creek. — We are informed on good authority that between Waterford and Bemus' mills, on French Creek, a distance of 22 miles, from 90 to 100 flat bottomed boats have started, or about to start, for Pittsburgh. These boats are built principally by individual farmers, and are freighted with hay, oats, potatoes, and various other kinds of produce; also, salts, staves, bark, shingles, cherry and walnut lumber, &c. The average freight of these boats is twenty-seven tons, and the average value of boat and cargo at Pittsburgh is estimated at \$500 - calculating the number of boats at 100, the total tonage would be 2700 tons, and the

product at Pittsburgh \$50,000. . . .

A further estimate is given at \$100,000 worth of business for French Creek for the season.

7. The Forks of the Trail: 1753-1939

Modern transportation between Erie and Pittsburgh was aided through its successive phases of development by use of the Venango route. But the necessity for intersectional commerce, which closely followed early efforts at settlement, demanded short, direct routes; and the course of the thoroughfares altered as road engineering progressed.

The natural obstacles which confronted the pioneer road-maker, are overcome today with comparative ease. The far-reaching organizations of State Highway Divisions, with their fleets of mechanized equipment, are able to keep major roads open at all times of the year. Even the lesser county routes, the gravel-top roads, are not overlooked. Today's adequate system of highway transportation demands competent upkeep; to that end, an army of workers are continually active. The snowplow, the large broom "roller-sweeper", the countless smaller road drags for gravel grading, the carefully plotted chart of each county's road necessities are the solution to a travel problem centuries old; yet the use of such devices was all unknown to the first road builder.

Natural hazards, especially climatic and seasonal changes, are still obstacles of travel, but today a snow-filled highway is cleared almost as rapidly as it clogs; while in the past, when a road became impassable, another route was attempted.

Natural Obstacles of Trail Routes

The conquest of natural obstacles in early road building was achieved only by ceaseless labor. The French "logged" or "planked" the road over marshes. Following the French, both English and Americans were forced to use the same methods. Many early journals mention a number of "bridges", and we should not be confused by the term. Bridging a stream is one matter, while many miles of "logged" road over swampy ground is another.

Patterson and Hutchins' Journal of 1760 states that it is "impossible for Carriages to Cross this Swamp except it be Bridged all the way". Bouquet's Journal of the same year reads: "a small Branch of French Creek over which is a very good Bridge." Obviously, there is a distinction. Routing the road another way to avoid swampy ground, would be the alternative to "Bridging" unless, as De Lery suggests, it would be possible to drain off the water.

For nearly fifty years the Venango Trail was known to trapper and soldier; yet the course of the trail has not been decided altogether by man, but has evinced a tendency to be influenced by the elements. The early surveyors of 1796 found the French and English roads almost impassable; but portions of the trail route yet visible were of service in pointing out the way. Bridge timbers were rotted and decayed, and wilderness undergrowth obscured the road over which had moved the frontier armies of France and England with their cohorts of savages. The rains and snows of thirty years had undone the work of the first road-makers. Mountains, "gulfs" or gorges, swamp and river crossings, alike, still remained trail obstacles to be overcome again and yet again. So the pioneer of 1790 faced the laborious task of making his own road, as best he might, over the roads and trails of 1753.

The advanced engineering methods of today lay a direct road between desired terminals. But the frontiersman was compelled to make his road course as obstacles dictated. The effect of these separate methods becomes evident when the course of the Venango Trail is compared with the present highway route.

Early Divergence of Trail Route

The course of the Venango Trail was subject to change even at the time of Washington's journey to Le Boeuf. The Indian, Half King, advised Washington that the straighter trail between Logstown (near present-day Ambridge) and Le Boeuf could not be taken. In Washington's Journal of November 25, 1753 we read:

. . . I . . . desired him [Half King] . . . to . . .
give me an account of the ways and distance . . .
[to LeBoeuf]. He told me that the nearest and
levellest way was now impassable, by reason of
many large miry savannas; that we must be
obliged to go by Venango [Franklin], and
should not get to the near fort in less than
five or six nights sleep, good traveling. . . .

The route referred to by Half King, over which fall rains had evidently made travel impossible, would lie almost straight north to Shenango, in Mercer County; from there north to Hartstown, in Crawford County; and taking a northeasterly course, skirt the southern edge of Conneaut Lake to arrive at Cussewago [Meadville].

No single route was used at all times of the year since such wilderness guides as Gist, Croghan and Hutchins, knew that seasonal changes affected the condition of the trails, and mapped out their journeys accordingly. Thus, alternate routes of the Venango Trail became known and used.

Legislation played a major part in governing the course of roads. As stated before, Irvine and Ellicott had great difficulty in gaining any exact knowledge of the trail region between Franklin and Waterford. When the first road surveys were ordered, the foremost consideration was to encourage settlement.

In 1806-7, the legislature granted funds for road improvement between Pittsburgh and Erie. The amount set aside for this improvement was less than two thousand dollars: Pittsburgh to Butler, four hundred dollars; Butler to Meadville, six hundred dollars; Meadville to Erie, four hundred and fifty dollars; and Meadville to Franklin, four hundred dollars.

Larger creeks and rivers were crossed by ferries. Bridges were used only across the smaller streams. But the funds were scarcely sufficient for such improvements as stump removal or ditching. In fact, considering the labor that must have been necessary at that time to put these roads into passable condition, the sum granted seems woefully small.

The portage route between the Port of Erie and Waterford became, in the early 1800's, an important commercial factor. At that time, the transportation of New York salt over the mountains to the Ohio Valley region was a slow and costly procedure; while the water route, via Lake Erie, with a fifteen mile portage to Waterford offered a less expensive and far more direct route. As in 1753 its antecedent had served the purpose of conquest, so in 1809 the portage served pioneer commerce.

Conceived in difficulty, the life of this historic thoroughfare was one of constant struggle for existence. This route, one of the earliest roads that did not follow the original trail course, was built by the Erie and Waterford Turnpike Company in an effort to aid commercial traffic of that era.

Money was to be raised through the subscription of three hundred shares of stock. But, after the shares had been subscribed, a new obstacle confronted the road makers: the collection of the actual funds. Subscribers who had not made a first payment of six dollars by November of 1806 were threatened with court action. Despite all difficulties, however, the Waterford Turnpike was completed and opened in 1809, and toll gates were established. For a time it earned money for its stockholders, but as expenses increased and the cost of repairs mounted, the toll collections were no longer sufficient to maintain the road, which consequently suffered from lack of repair.

Continual disputes over toll payments did not encourage good will toward the turnpike; and numerous arguments were followed by physical violence. Many refused to pay toll and detours were found around the toll houses. During the period 1817-1840, many of these routes, from Erie to Waterford, and their origins, became confused. An early historian of Erie County remarks that due to the large salt trade and the local activity taken in it, almost every waggoner cut his own road to escape the toll road. Some credence may be given this statement since the salt trade reached exceptional proportions during those years. Finally, about 1845, because of noncompliance with the articles of the contract, the charter was revoked. An aroused and hostile public demolished the toll gates and the Turnpike Company relinquished control of the road.

An early outgrowth of the Turnpike situation was the general use of the Shunpike. Many miles of the Shunpike route had been used from time to time, but had not been improved for general traffic, and the discord concerning the Turnpike once more turned the attention of travelers to the original Venango Trail. The stage company holding the franchise between Erie and Waterford now repaired the old trail route, and it was used by those who declined to pay toll on the Turnpike. By way of Summit, Greene and Waterford townships, the Shunpike, from the L. A. Hull farm in Summit township, followed the course of the original portage road, and even today a portion of it is still used by farmers in that vicinity.

Road Legislation from 1793 to 1818

The Bald Eagle and Waterford Road was ordered surveyed as early as 1793, but Indian trouble along the frontier prevented any actual efforts at construction or survey. The road from Reading to Presque Isle was also ordered surveyed in 1793, but not until 1795 when Ellicott and Irvine cut a bridle path from Waterford to Hickory Town on the Allegheny was any physical action attempted. This bridle path was intended to be a part of the Reading-Presque Isle Road.

In 1796 further legislation was enacted, reviving the Bald Eagle-Erie survey, and by 1799 the road had been routed through the wilderness from Bald Eagle to Port Barnette, east of Toby's Creek. The Bald Eagle-Waterford Road was badly maintained, with no bridges over the larger streams. It was largely impassable for any but horse or foot traffic and unfortunately it did not serve either Meadville or Franklin.

Accordingly, in 1812, an act was passed to create a road from Northumberland to Waterford. The road was to be in two sections, eastern and western. The western portion of the road was to begin at Waterford, pass through Meadville and Franklin, and end at the mouth of Anderson's Creek in Curwinsville, Clearfield County.

The eastern road was to begin there and continue to Northumberland via Bellfonte. The war of 1812 delayed the project until 1818. Completed in 1822, this road became known in some localities, as the Waterford-Susquehanna Road.

In 1849, the Meadville-Allegheny and Brokenstraw Plank Road was begun; but in 1851 only five miles of the route out of Meadville had been built when funds were exhausted. The road was finished as far as Guy's Mills, but construction ended there, and in 1857 the toll gates were removed.

The Erie and Waterford Plank Road is not to be confused with the Waterford Turnpike on which was located the town of Kearsarge. The only village on the Plank Road was a small settlement at the Erie County Mills. The Plank Road was finished in 1851 over an entirely new route, following the valleys of Mill Creek, Walnut Creek and Le Boeuf Creek, avoiding the severe grades of the old Turnpike. There were three toll gates along the right of way; one just north of Waterford; another at Captain J. C. Graham's in Summit; and the third near Eliot's Mill outside the Erie city limits of that time. The Plank Road did not pay, and was given to the townships about 1868 or '69.

The Edinboro Plank Road was completed in 1852 and followed the Waterford Plank to a point south of Walnut Creek, where it branched off to Edinboro. About the same time, the Edinboro and Meadville Plank Road was completed, but both of these roads were unprofitable and were also given to the townships in 1868 or '69.

The building of interlinking routes between the main roads created new junction centers. (The salt trade at the Port of Erie was responsible for many of these roads.) Le Boeuf gained rather than lost in the use of these newer routes. Roads from Erie and the northern section of the county and from Warren on the east met at Waterford which became, by 1811, the road center of Erie county.

The Edinboro-Meadville Road sought to avoid the Waterford-Meadville Road, and this disregard of the main terminals, Erie and Pittsburgh, had its effect on the course of later modern highways. Many sections of short roads such as these were re-routed from point to point along the Venango route, which presents another reason for the divergence of the present highway from the original trail.

8. Course of the Trail.

Trails followed no definite and exact course. They shifted with the seasons, and from year to year, for reasons that have been explained previously. This was true of the Venango Trail as well. The trail described in this chapter represents the average or ideal trail, a course that was followed in some years, perhaps in most years, but not in all years.

The Venango Trail begins at the mouth of Mill Creek, which empties into Presque Isle Bay, not far west of the harbor entrance. The bay was recognized by the French in 1753 as affording a natural harbor, sheltered from the occasional storms of the southern shore of Lake Erie. From the mouth of Mill Creek, near the foot of Sobieski Street, the trail runs west to Parade Street. Continuing out Parade to Twenty-eighth Street, the trail enters Old French Road (Route 97).

Old French Road is the actual course of the trail southward out of Erie, to a point a few feet beyond Gore Road intersection, where a concrete bridge spans the valley of Mill Creek. There the trail bears right, dropping down two hundred feet into the gorge. Through the valley, the trail keeps a right diagonal course, crossing Mill Creek, and leaving, on its course out of the valley, a depression which is still very distinct. The upward climb brings it out at the east side of Shunpike Road. There, the trail merges with and follows the Shunpike to Route 505.

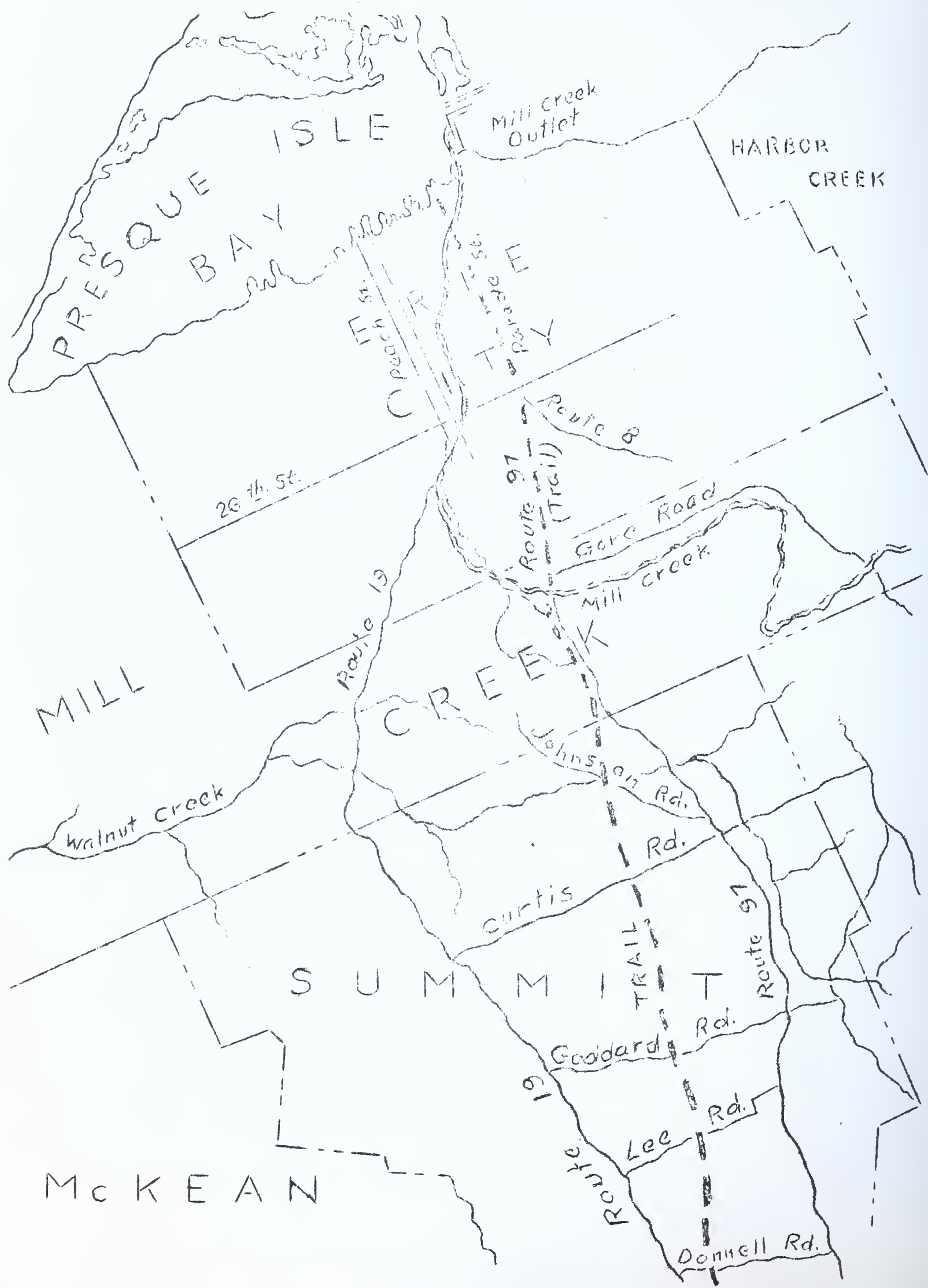
Route 505.

Here the trail once more leaves the traveled roadways of today and continues in a southerly direction, up a gentle slope in which there is a distinctly defined depression indicating a roadway. Crossing an open field, the trail descends into a valley and crosses a brook.

Bridge Found.

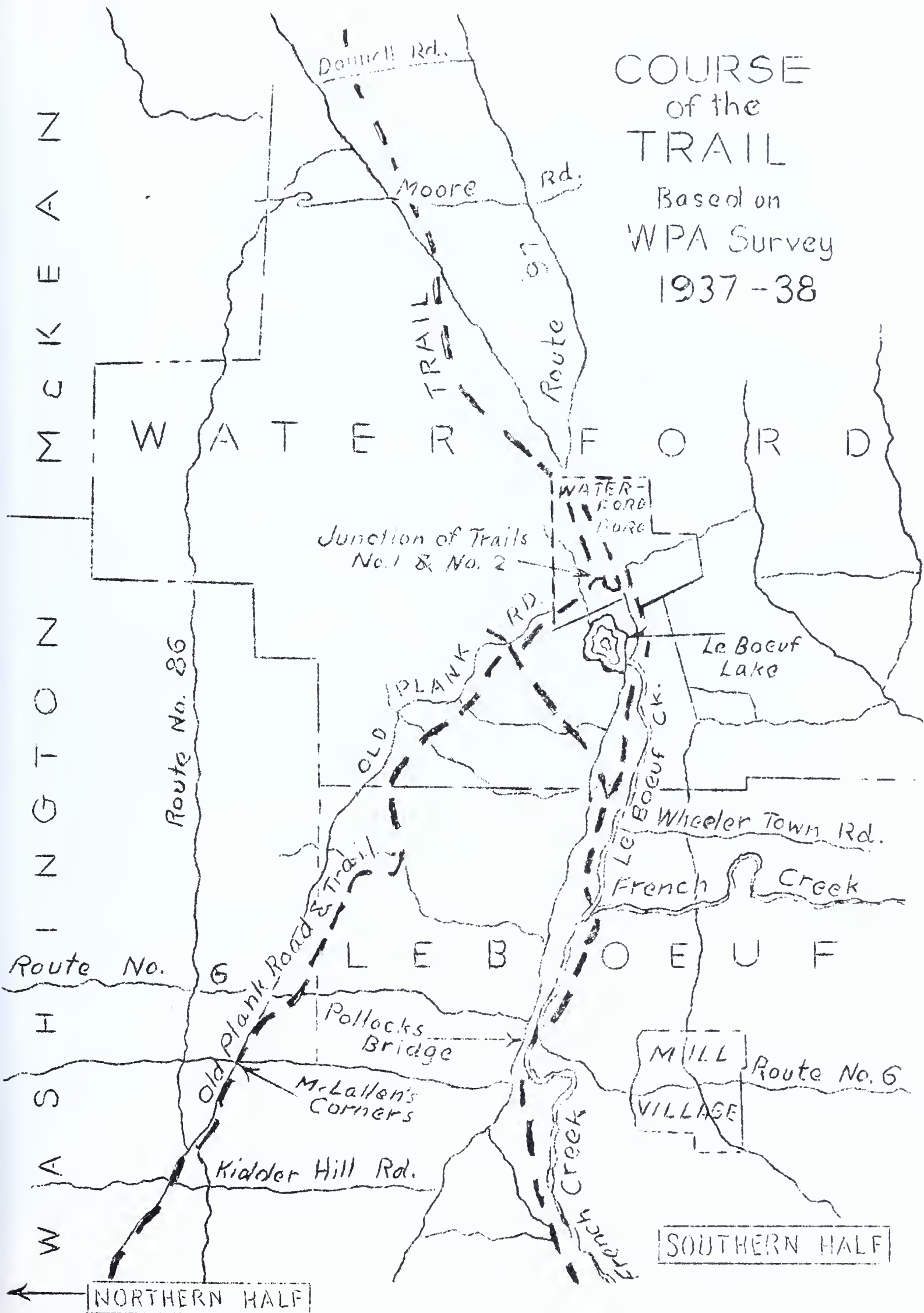
The Frontier Forts and Trails Survey of 1937 found at this point old timbers which clearly indicated a bridge over the brook. How and by whom the bridge was built is unknown, since other roads, no longer in use, have threaded the course of the Venango Trail.

After crossing the brook, the trail winds up out of the valley and again merges with the west side of Shunpike Road, which it follows to Lee Road, the terminal of Shunpike Road. From Lee Road, the trail continues south across an open field through a large woods to Donnell Road.



COURSE of the TRAIL

Based on
WPA Survey
1937-38





Before reaching Donnell Road, logs were again found on the north edge of a stream, with every indication of bridgework. The Frontier Forts and Trails Survey recorded: "In the spring of the year, when the line was run through this woods, the ground was marshy. There was a clearing through the woods indicating the trail."

Route 19.

Still bearing south, over fields and farms, the trail again crosses a creek, on both sides of which definite depressions were found in the creek banks, clearly indicating the trail.

After crossing Moore Road, the trail continues in a southerly direction, crossing Route 19. From this point on there are two possible routes.

The course taken by De Lery bore to the right of the traditional trail and continued southward. Turning east to the fort of which he says ". . . It could have been placed $4\frac{1}{2}$ arpents nearer . . .", De Lery entered Waterford from the west.

The traditional trail, however, after crossing Route 19, parallels this highway southward to the northern edge of Waterford. Again crossing Route 19, the trail passes through a field and enters Cherry Street. Following Cherry Street south to First Alley and then east along First Alley to High Street, the trail passes through Waterford and enters the main Highway southward (Route 19).

Southwest Trail at Waterford.

Leaving the main trail in Waterford at the intersection of High Street and First Alley, a secondary trail runs west along First Alley to Walnut, thence northward along Walnut to Second Street, and leaves Waterford at that point, following a westward course along a lane. Then crossing a creek, where parts of an old bridge were found, the trail continues to a sawmill. Bearing right, the trail passes the Waterford Water Works and merges with a "black top" road. At the time the pump house was built, traces of an old corduroy road were found.

Around Lake Le Boeuf, the trail keeps to a southwest direction, across cultivated farm lands to the Taylor property. Keeping a general southwest course, the trail joins a graveled road once known as the Waterford-Meadville Plank Road.

The trail follows this road for a short distance, then crosses the Lakes-to-Sea Highway (Route 6). From this highway the trail continues along the graveled road, across level fertile farm land through the valley of Conneattée Creek to McLallen's Corners and follows along this valley to the Crawford County Line.

Main Trail from Waterford to County Line.

The main trail leaves Waterford via Route 19 in almost a direct southward course, over the Le Boeuf Creek Flats to a ridge of small hills. Bearing left around this ridge, the trail continues southward across Route 97, and up a gentle slope to the east bank of Le Boeuf Creek. From this point, the trail runs left along the creek bank for about 900 feet, where it makes a right turn and crosses the creek.

Between Le Boeuf Creek and Wheelertown Road the trail skirts the west bank of Le Boeuf Creek. After crossing the Wheelertown road, the trail approaches the junction of Le Boeuf and French creeks. At this junction, French Creek forms almost a right angle with Le Boeuf Creek, and where the trail crosses, the water is shallow and easily forded.

From the fording place, the trail bears slightly westward, across a meadow into a graveled road known as Creek Road, and follows this road southwest along the western bank of French Creek to the Lakes-to-Sea Highway (Route 6). Crossing the highway the trail continues south and crosses French Creek, following the west bank of the creek through fields and woods to what is known as Camp Mystic. Here the trail joins a graveled road which it follows in a southeast direction, climbing a ridge along the west side of French Creek Valley to the Crawford County Line.

From County Line to Meadville.

From the County Line to Meadville, there were trails along both sides of French Creek.

The route followed by George Washington and his party went along the east side of French Creek to Le Boeuf. They left the main trail at "the big crossing" because of high water.

However the straightest route possible between Waterford and Meadville, and the one most generally used, lay west of the creek to the present town of Venango (below Cambridge Springs). This trail joined the one that used "the big crossing", a ford known to such wilderness characters as Croghan and Gist, who speak, in their journals, of a fording place between Le Boeuf (Waterford) and Cussewago (Meadville).

Modern Road on Trail Route to Meadville.

No modern highway follows the exact course of the trail to Meadville. However, Route 19 via Cambridge Springs, Venango and Saegerstown is built over some portions of the original trail, particularly between Venango and Meadville.

Meadville.

Meadville is built on the site of the former Indian village of Cussewago, near where David Mead began his settlement in 1788. The Venango Trail follows Water Street through Meadville and joins with the highway to Franklin (Route 322). A study of Scull's and Washington's maps will show that 322 closely follows the line of the trail.

Cochranton---McFate Site.

Cochranton, through which the trail passes, is built on the site of an ancient Indian village. Extensive excavations on the McFate farm rewarded the Frontier Forts and Trails Survey with an abundance of artifacts dating back to early Indian occupation of this region.

Route 322 follows the east bank of French Creek to Franklin, crossing Sugar Creek and winding through a mountain gap known as "The Narrows".

At the junction of French Creek and the Allegheny river stands Franklin, the site of French Fort Machault. Here the trail leaves Route 322 and enters the highway to Pittsburgh (Route 8).

Franklin to Pittsburgh.

A glance at Scull's map of 1770 shows the course from Franklin to Pittsburgh to lie very nearly in a straight line. This was the main trail, although other routes were used from time to time.

Among variant routes from Erie to Pittsburgh was the River Route, following French Creek to the Allegheny at Franklin, then down the Allegheny to Pittsburgh. But this water-course was too difficult for loaded upriver canoes, and was generally used only on southward trips.

Between Pittsburgh and Franklin, the Venango Trail route known to the early traders would follow a course as outlined by Hanna:

The Venango Trail, leading from Shannopins Town (the Delaware village at the mouth of Two Mile Run in what is now the Twelfth Ward of the City of Pittsburgh) to Venango, crossed the Allegheny River at the mouth of that Run, and led northwest, probably up Girty's Run, through the present townships of Shaler, Ross, McCandless, Franklin (or Pine), and Marshall, in Allegheny County; Cranberry, Jackson, Forward, Connoquenessing, Franklin, Brady, Slippery Rock, and Mercer, in Butler County; and Irwin and Sandy Creek, in Venango County.⁶

A close comparison of early maps will show an evident divergence from the main overland trail between Pittsburgh and Franklin. These variations later helped early highway builders to find the best route of communication between these points.

To trace a modern highway route from Franklin to Pittsburgh, we leave Franklin via Route 8. Following Route 8 to its junction with Route 308, we take 308 to a point just above Butler. At this junction, we again take Route 8, and continue to Pittsburgh. This modern route, following almost a straight line, corresponds in general to the route as designated by Washington and Scull.

In the construction of interstate highways, such as the Lakes-to-Sea (Route 6) and the Perry Highway (Route 19), which meet other arterial highways of the State and Nation, use was made of the best natural advantages of all short routes and the mechanical equipment of modern methods was brought to the task. Guided by the mistakes of the past, the modern road maker was able to take from each era the best features of its roads; and this advantage, coupled with the literal ability either to move mountains or to tunnel through them, permits us to use highways that would have amazed the earlier road builders.

6 Hanna, The Wilderness Trail, Vol. 1, p. 271.

NOTES

The Story of the Venango Trail is based upon materials gathered by the Frontier Forts and Trails Survey. The complete results of the engineering survey of the trail are embodied in 28 large drawings, on a scale of 100 feet to an inch. Blueprints of these drawings will be placed on file with the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, the Library of Congress, the Pennsylvania State College Library, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, and the Erie County Historical Society. The sketch map between pages 46 and 47 is derived from these drawings.

The historical sources quoted have been identified in the text or by footnotes in only a few instances, when it was thought that the student might wish to read the remainder of the item. The other sources are listed below:

page

- 7 Deposition of John Hockettattler, B.M., Add. MSS., Series 21658, f. 132.
- 8-9 Letter, Duquesne to Minister, August 30, 1753, printed in Brodhead, Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York, Vol. X, p. 256.
- 9 Letter, Vaudreuil to Minister, July 24, 1755, Paris, Archives Nationales, C11A100, f. 66.
- 10 Letter, Vaudreuil to Minister, October 30, 1755, Paris, Archives Nationales, C11A100, f. 126.
- 11-12 Letter, Contrecoeur to Minister, November 28, 1755, Paris, Archives Nationales, C11A100, f. 250.
- 13-17 Journal of Chaussegros De Lery, 1754-1755. (Northwestern Pennsylvania Historical Series, No. 2). Translated from the version printed in Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Quebec, 1928-1929.
- 18 The table of distances is derived from the report of the engineering survey made by the project. The student who wishes to compare the modern measurements with De Lery's should remember that the French foot was somewhat shorter than the standard foot of today.

- 19 Indian Intelligence, Pittsburgh, March 17, 1759, B. M., Add. MSS. 21644, f. 106.
- 19-20 Captain Lee's Journal of his Journey from Niagara to Pittsburgh, B. M., Add. MSS. 21644, f. 431.
- 20-21 Patterson and Hutchins' Journal, from the Map Division of the Public Archives of Canada.
- 22 Journal of our March from Fort Pitt, to Wenango and Thence to Prisque Isle, B. M., Add. MSS. 21638, f. 103.
- 22-23 Letter, Bouquet to Monckton, 11th August 1760, printed in Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, Fourth Series, Vol. IX, pp. 296-299.
- 24 Letter, Bouquet to Gladwin, August 28, 1763, B. M., Add. MSS. 21649, f. 313.
- 25 Letter, Brodhead to Washington, September 16, 1779, printed in Pennsylvania Archives, First Series, Vol. XII, pp. 155-158.
- 25-26 Letter, Irvine to Washington, May 2, 1782, printed in Butterfield, Washington-Irvine Correspondence, p. 109.
- 28-32 Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny, printed in Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Vol. VII, pp. 237-409.
- 33-35 Report of Andrew Ellicott to Governor Mifflin, December 30th, 1794, printed in Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, Vol. VI, pp. 846-850.
- 35-36 Letter, William Irvine and Andrew Ellicott to Governor Mifflin, Pittsburgh, October 27th, 1795. Irvine Papers, Vol. XIII, in Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- 37 Contract between Governor Mifflin and John Nicholson, in Executive Minutes of Governor Mifflin, printed in Pennsylvania Archives, Ninth Series, Vol. I, p. 734.

